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QUESTION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF ALL PERSONS SUBJECTED TO ANY FORM OF DETENTION OR IMPRISONMENT

Letter dated 7 April 1997 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations Office at Geneva addressed to the Chairman of the Commission on Human Rights

I have the honour to transmit to you, in your capacity as Chairman of the fifty-third session of the Commission on Human Rights, a statement setting forth my Government's position in regard to the allegations contained in document E/CN.4/1997/NGO/23 of 5 March 1997, trusting that you will have it circulated as an official document under item 8 of the session's agenda.

(Signed) Taher AL-HUSSAMI

GE.97-11714 (E)

1. The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic respects the International Federation of Human Rights Leagues as a non-governmental organization enjoying consultative status with the Economic and Social Council. However, my Government wishes to express its deep regret at the said Federation's ill-considered granting of ongoing affiliate status to the so-called "Organization of Committees for the Defence of Democratic Freedoms and Human Rights in Syria".

2. The allegations and accusations contained in the Federation's said letter addressed to the Secretary-General and published in the above-mentioned document are old, false and unfounded and the Permanent Mission of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations Office at Geneva has already replied thereto in its notes 12/92 of 26 March 1992, 40/93 of 12 October 1993 and 26/96 of 25 June 1996 addressed to the Centre for Human Rights.

3. The above-mentioned Syrian notes clearly stated that the names mentioned in the Federation's letter were those of criminals against whom court judgements had been handed down in accordance with domestic legislation. Contrary to the Federation's allegations, they were not the names of defenders of human rights. The persons in question were detained due to their membership of a prohibited clandestine organization that acts against the security of the State with funding from external bodies and uses bombs, assassination, terrorism and incitement to armed insurrection as a means to achieve its despicable aims.

4. Those Syrian notes clearly indicated that the persons in question were tried in public and defended by 10 competent lawyers. They admitted their guilt and were sentenced to various penalties, depending on the type of crime committed by each of them and the provisions of the law. Three were acquitted for lack of evidence, four were sentenced to a three-year term of imprisonment, four others were sentenced to a five-year term of imprisonment and six were sentenced to terms of imprisonment ranging from 8 to 10 years. This provides a clear indication of the fairness and lawfulness of their trial and of the sentences handed down against them. Some were covered by the general amnesty promulgated by the President of the Republic on 13 March 1992, while others completed their sentences and were subsequently released.

5. With regard to the other allegations and accusations against Syria contained in the Federation's letter, it is evident that they are totally inconsistent with the information made available to the Centre for Human Rights and the special rapporteurs, which confirms that the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic is cooperating with a view to safeguarding human rights and fundamental freedoms.

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